

## **Position of The University of Hong Kong on the UGC Report “Aspirations for the Higher Education System in Hong Kong”**

As a general comment, HKU welcomes the Report “Aspirations for the Higher Education System in Hong Kong” as a timely and expansive document. We feel that the recommendations are, for the most part, well reasoned. HKU has made it clear on many occasions that it believes in “plan and performance” mechanisms to ensure appropriate funding for its academic activities, and maintains that competition in the international arena is a means to achieve excellence. This concept of competition through assessment of performance underpins the manner in which HKU operates and thus guides our response to the Report.

### **Role differentiation**

1. *Recommendation 1.* We agree that rankings of universities world-wide is an established fact and that maintaining a leading position in league tables is important to stakeholder engagement. Yet, there is a need for a spectrum of post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong and not all can or should be comprehensive, research led universities, and compared within the same league tables. Given the diversity of provision, strategic directions for the future are important so that institutions of different character and role, both privately and publicly funded, can determine their priorities. Diversity is indeed a positive attribute of the Hong Kong system but can only be effective if a mechanism can be found to allow the leading elements in each part of the spectrum to flourish with high quality output. This can most likely be best achieved by treating these different elements as parts of a single system, and judging the success of each by international benchmarking.
  
2. *Recommendation 3.* We are glad that the report touches on aspects of Role Differentiation, but feel that there could be greater emphasis placed here, particularly on mechanisms to ensure that different roles can be upheld and fulfilled, and that excellence throughout the spectrum is rewarded, for example through differentiated funding. (*Recommendations 27 and 28*). Through international benchmarking, a competitive system rather than a leveling system might be maintained, without the need to directly compare individual institutions within Hong Kong.

### **Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)**

3. *Recommendation 6.* We note that the report suggests that “a transparent and trustworthy Credit Accumulation and Transfer System should be developed” in the same way as did the Sutherland Report. We are not at all convinced that this can be achieved given the complexities and individual autonomies within the system, the necessity to maintain a system that is inherently diverse, and the fact that CATS, although recommended, has not been taken up before now. All institutions at present have arrangements for granting “advanced standing” which allow for lateral and vertical movement of individual students within the system, especially the articulation of sub-degree graduates to undergraduate programmes.

### **Internationalization**

4. *Recommendations 9-18.* HKU is very much in agreement with the views and observations of UGC on internationalization, and itself considers internationalization a priority. For us, internationalization is not merely the recruitment of non-local students (undergraduate and postgraduate, especially RPG students) and faculty members, or the pursuit of international research standing. Internationalization also includes active contributions by the University, its staff and students to the international academic

community, including efforts to help Hong Kong to become a regional education hub.

5. We are pleased to see that the UGC is aware of the conditions for, and problems associated with internationalization. In our view funding for internationalization initiatives and accommodation for international and overseas exchange students, are the main problems. Thus we strongly support *Recommendation 11* (an additional funding stream should be attributed to the UGC to fund internationalization initiatives) and *Recommendation 13* (the Government should increase hostel accommodation for local and non-local students as a matter of urgency). Our internationalization activities are still early in their development and we still have a considerable way to go in multiplying our efforts to provide support and resources to assist non-local students to adapt to Hong Kong.

### **Research**

6. *Recommendations 23, 24, 25, 31, 32.* The University of Hong Kong has long felt that there is clear room for improvement in the academic research sector, particularly in the nature of research support. In its latest ADP, HKU has emphasized the importance of the teaching-research nexus and is in support of Recommendation 23. The University has long been stating that the sources of research funding are far too few in Hong Kong and thus applauds Recommendation 24. We fully support Recommendation 25, but wish to emphasize that it will be necessary to identify the real and full costs of doing research, and that those costs must be covered by an appropriate increase in overhead charges (research infrastructure). We strongly agree with the concept of competition for research funds and that the UGC is correct in adjusting the balance of the research portion of the Block Grant and peer assessed research projects within the RGC. We fully support this as strategic move to achieve excellence within the system, and note that the proposal will bring the ratio of competitive versus block grant research funding more in line with international norms. However, it will be necessary to consider a funding mechanism that allows new and young researchers to step onto the research ladder, and to attract the best talent to Hong Kong to establish their research profile. We see that the UGC has itself recognized this problem with the proposal to introduce a young researchers' funding scheme. Arguments that the Arts and Humanities might suffer from re-allocation of research funds are not supported by international experience and the proposed introduction of the UGCs fellowship scheme for Arts, Humanities and the Social Sciences will further mitigate against such a trend. We also strongly support the move to make more RPg allocations based on institutional performance and quality in a competitive fashion, as long as appropriate performance indicators are utilized in a transparent manner.

### **Self Financing Educational activities/Community College**

7. *Recommendations 8,33,34.* HKU is basically in agreement with these recommendations. We are fully aware of the UGC's position in respect of cross-subsidy. We would note, however, that in many cases the self funded activities of institutions actually subsidize publicly funded activities, as is the case in universities around the world. We see no problem with the transfer of funds in this direction.

We note that the UGC is "not convinced that UGC-funded institutions should be heavily involved in the provision of self-financing sub-degree programmes" (paragraph 7.26), and that "there should be greater transparency in the financial relationship between UGC- funded institutions and self-financing courses either within the institution or in an affiliate, such as a Community College. At HKU, self-financing courses are restricted to

the Masters level and go through a rigorous process of approval both academic and financial, to ensure they are not subsidized by block grant funding.

The report also recommends that the community college operations of UGC-funded institutions should be completely separated from their parent institutions. This has been the practice of HKU for many years. Our Community College is operated under HKU SPACE which is a legal entity separate from HKU.

### **Summary**

HKU welcomes and supports the UGC report “Aspiration for the Higher Education System in Hong Kong” and is in full agreement with many of the recommendations. We are concerned, however, that the means by which some of these recommendations might be fulfilled, are not so apparent, e.g. the mechanism to ensure role differentiation